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THE RECEPTION OF SPRING

OBSEVED IN FOOCHOW, CHINA

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ONE OF THE JOYFUL DAYS of the year was that on which the new spring was received in the eastern suburb of the city. The Chinese divide their year not only into four seasons, the eight seasons, the twelve months, but they also have twenty-four solar periods or breaths. The first of these twenty-four periods is called the commencement of spring. The day is fixed by the time when the sun is fifteen degrees in the constellation Aquarius.

The ceremony of receiving the spring is a very ancient one. In the Li Chi, in the rescripts for the first month of the year, we read: 'This is the month in which the reign of spring is inaugurated. Three days before the inauguration of spring, the chief secretary informs the son of heaven of the fact saying: "On a certain day spring will commence. The great power of spring is manifested in the element wood (i. e. vegetation)." The son of heaven thereupon practices abstinence. On the day when spring arrives, the son of heaven conducts the three superior ministers of state, the nine secondary ministers of state, the princes and the grand prefects to meet the spring in the eastern suburb. Upon his return he distributes gifts in the court of the palace to the superior ministers, the secondary ministers, the princes and the grand prefects.'

In China the reception of spring was a state ceremony, but it was perhaps the most popular state ceremony, for all the people entered very heartily into it. The customs described in this article belong to the Ch'ing dynasty which has passed away. The new ceremonial in harmony with republican ideas

has not been established yet. On the day before the commencement of spring the marine inspector, the two magistrates of Foochow and their deputies met together in the yamen of the prefect in Foochow City. They were dressed in fur-lined garments. On their heads they had caps with a button in the form of a crane. They rode in open sedan chairs. At the prefect's yamen they found a bountiful feast and after the feast they started with their retinue toward the eastern suburb. The procession was headed by a band of musicians. There were the tablets with the titles and offices of the magistrates. There were one or more umbrellas with ten thousand names given to a popular official when he leaves his post. All official decorations were exhibited on this occasion which was made as magnificent as possible. Behind the open sedan chairs of the officials followed a long line of attendants each carrying a bouquet of artificial flowers belonging to the spring season. On this day the prefect had the right of way through the streets, and so the viceroy and the higher officials residing in Foochow made this their at-home day, in order to avoid the unpleasantness of yielding the right of way to an inferior official.

The procession filed through the crowded streets, through the east gate to a pavilion called the pavilion of the spring bull. Here on an altar stood the spring bull. His ribs were made of mulberry wood plastered over with clay and covered with colored paper. Beside the bull was an image of the tutelary god of the current year, called T'ai Sui, the Great Year. In the monthly rescripts of the Li Chi he is called Kou Mang. The god is connected with the star Jupiter, whose revolution in twelve years gives it great power over the years on earth and the events which happen in them. Before these two images was a table with candles, an incense burner, fruits, and cups of wine. In front of the table were mats for the officials. Only the civil officials take part in this ceremony. The prefect stands before the table, the others take places behind him. On each side is a ceremonial usher who directs the ceremony. The ceremonial usher gives the order to kneel. The officials all kneel and bow three times. They arise. An attendant at the left of the prefect hands a cup to him and then pours the wine into it. The official raises it three times

up to his forehead and then gives it to the attendant. Then the prefect bows three times, the others likewise bow. Then the musicians form into line, the music strikes up. The clay bull and the image of T'ai Sui are carried on a float into the city. The officials bring up the rear. As the bull passes through the streets the people throw salt and rice at it. This is said to avoid the noxious vapours called *shach'i*. This throwing of salt and rice may possibly correspond to the custom mentioned in the Li Chi. 'The son of heaven ordered the officers to perform the great ceremonies for the dissipation of pestilential vapours, to dismember the victims and disperse them in the four directions, to take out the clay bull and thereby escort the cold vapours.'

When the procession arrives at the yamen of the prefect, the officials form a circle about the bull. Each one strikes the bull with a varicolored stick three times, breaking off pieces of clay. The sound for the character three also means to produce and hence is regarded as propitious. The bits of clay and other parts of the bull are picked up by the crowd. Some people throw lumps of clay to their pigs to stimulate their growth to attain the size of the bull.

Besides this public ceremony there is a reception to spring in each household. A table is placed in the main reception hall at the edge of the court. On it are put an incense-burner, candles, flowers, and three cups of wine. The head of the family takes three sticks of incense, lights them, raises them to his forehead, and then places them into the burner. Then he kneels and bows thrice. Fire-crackers are let off, idol paper is burned. Some families invite Taoist priests to recite incantations on this day.

On this day the children are not whipped, nor scolded. All unpleasant things are avoided, the nightsoil is not removed. All things with strong odors are avoided.

What is the significance of the bull and the image of T'ai Sui? They contained an epitome of the coming year. All the details of their anatomy were carefully fixed the year before in the sixth month by the Imperial Board of Astronomy in Peking. The bull was made after the winter solstice on the first day denoted by the cyclical character *shen*. The ribs were made of mulberry wood because this is one of the trees

which bud very early and hence possess much of the *yang* principle. The clay was taken from before the temple of K'ai Ming Wang who was at one time ruler in Fukien. The bull was four feet high to represent the four seasons. He was eight feet long in imitation of the eight seasons into which the Chinese divide the year. The tail was one foot and two inches long to represent the twelve months of the year. The Chinese count ten inches to the foot.

Thus far the anatomy of the bull is readily understood. What follows is very simple if we once obtain the key. The Chinese have ten characters which are called stems, and twelve other characters which are called branches. The first stem character is placed before the first branch character and the second stem character before the second branch character and so on until all the combinations have been made. They number sixty in all and are called the *Chia tzu*, the cycle. The cyclical signs were early applied in numbering days. Probably during the Han dynasty the cycle was applied to the years. The twelve branches are employed as names of the twelve hours into which the Chinese day is divided. Now these stem characters and branch characters belong to one of the five elements, or primordial essences, water, fire, wood, metal, and earth. These primordial essences are attached to certain colors. These essences either repress one another as water does fire, or they produce one another as water produces wood. Here then we have the simple principles of a profound science. In order to understand the application we must remember that a character is not a mere sign of an idea. The character is the double of the object which it signifies. It has a very real power over the object.

The different parts of the bull's anatomy are colored with various colors. These colors are determined by the cyclical characters. For example, the cyclical characters for the year 1911 were *Sing hai*. The head of the bull is determined by the first character *sing*. *Sing* belongs to metal. Metal is white. Hence the head of the bull in 1911 was white. The color of the body is determined by the second character in the cycle, namely, *hai*. Now *hai* belongs to water and water is black and hence in 1911, the last celebration under the dynasty, the body of the bull was black.

Each important part of the bull's anatomy corresponds to the cyclical character of the day, or the branch character for the hour of the day at which the procession takes place. We can readily imagine the refinement to which this can be carried. Once grant the premises, and the whole system is very logically developed.

The year many belong to the male principle or it may belong to the female principle. In case the year belongs to the male principle, the mouth of the bull is open. If the year belongs to the female principle the mouth of the bull is closed. If the year belongs to the male principle the tail of the bull is on the left side, because the left side belongs to the male principle. The reason for this is that the male principle belongs to the east. The emperor sits facing the south or is supposed to sit that way. His left is toward the east and hence the left belongs to the male principle.

As to the image of Kou Mang, who is the tutelary god of spring and is regarded as the tutelary god of the year, there are definite regulations. The image of this tutelary god is three feet, six inches, and five tenths of an inch high. If we remember that a Chinese foot has ten inches, we shall see that his height represents the three hundred and sixty five days of the year. He holds a whip in his hand which is two feet four inches long and represents the twenty-four seasons. The age of the image, the color of his clothing, the color of his belt, the position of his coiffure, the holding of his hand over his left ear, or his right ear, his shoes, his trousers, in short every detail of his image is determined by the cyclical characters for the year, the day, the hour and the elements and colors which correspond to them, and by the quality which the five elements possess of either repressing or producing one another.

The nose of the bull has a ring of mulberry wood. In Kou Mang's hand is a whip. The rope may be made of flax, grass-cloth fiber, or silk according to the cyclical characters of the day. If the inauguration of spring takes place before the new year, the tutelary god of the year stands in front of the bull. If the inauguration of spring takes place five or more days after the New Year, the image is behind the bull. If it takes place between these dates, the image stands at the side of the

bull. This position of the tutelary god of the year tells the husbandman whether to begin planting early or late. If the image stands in front of the bull the planting will be early in the New Year. The popular view held that if the image had both hands over his ears there would be much thunder. If he held his hand only over one ear there would be less thunder.

It is unnecessary to go into further details. The bull and the image of the guardian deity of the year epitomized the great events in the year to be. The ceremony was not only symbolic of the sun's power to bring the blessings of the year. It was a method of inducing the sun to return and dispense his gifts to expectant men. It left behind it a confidence and hope that the spring thus well begun would issue forth into summer and be crowned with bountiful harvests in the autumn.

This ceremony, so simple and beautiful, connects the Chinese with Europe with its May day and various other customs of ushering in the Spring of the Year.